

## How the USAID/Bolivia PL-480 Title II Food Program Supports Neighborhood Empowerment

*This is the 13th in a series of technical bulletins by the U. S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) LAC Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Technical Services (LAC TECH II) project. The authors: Jonathan Sleeper is Deputy Agriculture Officer at the USAID Mission in Bolivia in charge of PL-480 Programs. Charles Patterson is Director of Strategies for International Development, a newly formed PVO. This Bulletin is the first to be drafted by a field officer. It also is the first--among others to come--to describe how participatory approaches to development are used successfully in programs in the region.*

*Food-for-Work under the Title II program continues to be an extremely important "safety net" for the very poorest in urban areas displaced by structural adjustment and economic stabilization programs, and for building badly-needed public infrastructure for poor people. In Bolivia, however, it has had an additional effect: empowerment of poor neighborhoods and their increased participation in decision-making in the mayor's office.*

Benancia Mamani is a 40-year-old Aymara woman who recently migrated to the city of El Alto from the Altiplano, the 13,000-foot plateau surrounded by the Andes mountains, where her husband Juan was a miner. Benancia, Juan and their four children live in a one-room adobe hut in Bolívar, a marginal area of the city. Juan is usually absent during the day working, or more commonly, seeking menial day-labor.

Bolívar, named after a famous tin mine which went bust in the early 1980s, is populated mostly by unemployed ex-miners. In this neighborhood—like most areas of El Alto—there are few public services: the streets are muddy, filled with potholes, and criss-crossed with open sewers; access to po-

table water is difficult, electrification is limited, garbage collection is rare and there are few local playgrounds or community parks. More than two million

people live in similar conditions in the marginal areas of the major cities and towns in the Altiplano and Inter-Andean Valleys of Bolivia.



Under the USAID/Bolivia food for work program, neighbors work together to improve drainage of human waste in marginal urban areas.

**Construction of Public Infrastructure in Poor Neighborhoods Is an Important Benefit of Food for Work Programs**

Every year, the USAID/Bolivia Title II Urban Food for Work (UFFW) program provides temporary employment for about 150,000 persons with virtually no alternative sources of income living in the marginal areas of Bolivia's major cities and secondary towns. Over \$200 million of public infrastructure was constructed under the program since 1989, including 1,700 km. of street and road paving, 750 km. of potable water systems and 900 km. of sewage systems, mostly in poor neighborhoods.

Benancia and her neighbors have tried hard to convince the mayor's office to provide public services to their neighborhood. However, the municipal budget is very thin because of the weakness of financial control and tax administration, and there are bigger, more influential neighborhoods, many that voted for the mayor's political party, with more clout in obtaining services. The projects that do get financed by the municipality tend to be projects which for Benancia and her neighbors are essentially useless—e.g., plazas and park areas located downtown.

Benancia and her neighbors belong to the Bolivar Neighborhood Association (*Junta Vecinal*). Most neighborhoods in El Alto and other cities in the Altiplano have neighborhood organizations that usually meet once a month. The topic of conversation is always about how to improve the neighborhood.

"They don't talk about the corruption trial going on in the parliament, or about the value of democratic participation, or about

over to use the empty lot across the street as a toilet—it is unsanitary and sets a bad example for our children. We have been trying for ten years to get the municipality to help us construct a sewer line."

"The residents of El Alto don't like to pay taxes," says Pinzino. "Tax revenue goes into the city's

voter registration," says Salvatore Pinzino, USAID PSC Food for Peace officer in USAID/Bolivia. "The topic of conversation usually is something like the following: Every morning, the folks from the next neighborhood come

willing to pay for the materials for a public work or service that they themselves use. Under the Title II program, they gather in public meetings and decide by vote to help pay for the materials for a work that they themselves choose."

Faced with continued lack of response from the municipality to their requests for assistance, Benancia's neighborhood group sought help from one of the PVOs working with the USAID/Bolivia Title II program. A PVO representative met with the neighborhood group and helped them develop a list of priority projects they wanted in their neighborhood. Invariably, in the marginal areas of the major cities across Bolivia, the most important items in the list are: sewerage; potable water;



Sometimes community meetings take hours before the list of priority projects is developed.

treasury; nobody knows how it's spent, and it rarely comes back in public works and services. But residents of the poor *barrios* are

cobblestoning of streets; curbs and sidewalks; and community centers or school improvements. After long debate, Benancia's neighbor-

hood group decided that they really wanted a sewer line, but couldn't afford the \$30.00 per family for sewer pipes. They settled on cobblestoning several streets of their neighborhoods because of the lower cash outlay.

The PVO representative then went to the mayor's office with the president of the Bolivar Neighborhood Association, and explained to the mayor's technical staff that if the

municipality could find enough funds for gasoline and the use of a dump truck to bring stones from the river, the PVO would provide the labor to cobblestone the streets in Bolivar, using Title II food to pay for the work.

The mayor's office was quick to understand the advantage of this approach: by using food to pay

laborers, it could extend its already meager budgetary resources for public works by as much as a third. The mayor's office gave



Stonepaving of streets is a high priority for poor neighborhoods.

the Bolivar request greater priority in its annual budget, because Bolivar had a resource to offer—labor—which represented constituent votes as well. Many poor neighborhoods in the marginal areas of Bolivia's cities are now given priority in municipal public works projects because of this extra resource—food paid for labor—which the neighborhood can

offer through the Title II PVO.

Benancia and her neighborhood group did not stop with the cobblestoning of the streets. After two more long meetings, they decided to pay the \$30.00 per family for the installation of the sewer in their neighborhood. It took a lot of time because every neighbor had to agree to pay his or her share from their meager incomes.

A new process has started. Before, poor communities had little or no say in municipal decision-making. Now, because they can bring a resource to the bargaining table—food for work—local groups are having a greater say in the decisions affecting their neighborhoods in municipalities that tra-

#### **Increasing the Food Security Impact**

The USAID/Bolivia Title II Urban Food for Work program was originally designed to provide a "safety net" for the urban poor in order to cushion the effects of the structural adjustment and economic stabilization policies adopted by the government in 1986. About 20,000 tons of food each year is given to workers in the program, in a country with a per capita deficit of at least 150 calories per day. The program has two effects on the food security of the urban poor: (1) it improves direct access to food by the nutritionally vulnerable; and (2) many infrastructure projects, such as potable water and sewage systems, indirectly contribute to better family health and nutrient utilization. After the U.S. Congress amended Public Law 480 in 1990 to include a stronger emphasis on food security, the Mission asked the cooperating sponsors to take actions that would improve the food security impact of the program, including: provision of hot lunches, day-care centers, first-aid and better tools for the workers; requesting that the municipalities and not the workers pay the "container fee" (beneficiary contribution); and increased targeting of poor neighborhoods. Use of the food by grass-roots organizations in these neighborhoods as a means of eliciting more public works from the municipalities was an unanticipated benefit of the program.

ditionally offered only weak representation and inadequate resources. Greater participation by neighborhood groups in turn elicits more citizen-provided resources, such as in-kind support or self-imposed "taxes" to implement local projects. Mayors' offices are beginning to look beyond just meeting the needs of members of their political parties and to think in terms of assisting the entire community.

Additional technical assistance can greatly enhance this process, according to a recent evaluation of the pilot program (Peter, Natiello, Evaluation of the Amended PVO Management Support Project (511-0578), USAID/Bolivia, September 1993). Workshops for the neighborhood association on how to select, design, plan, implement and supervise public infrastructure

and service projects can improve democratic knowledge and practices among beneficiary communities. The average resident participating in the program with his or her neighborhood association thus becomes more knowledgeable about such things as: consideration of an idea or proposal; ensuing debate, compromise, and the vote; rules of order; as well as better understanding of the roles of the constituent, the politician and the public servant. Workshops on the fundamentals of urban planning and municipal finance can help both residents and middle-level municipal officials reach more informed solutions to local problems, better leverage municipal resources and achieve more transparency and accountability in municipal government. The result is a strengthening of poor people's democratic knowl-

edge, attitudes and practices.

Food security should always be the overriding goal of any Title II program. The USAID/Bolivia Title II urban food-for-work program supplements the family diets of the very poorest urban dwellers. It also supports the construction of badly needed water and sanitation infrastructure in poor neighborhoods. However, the Bolivia program shows that urban food for work can have the additional effect of promoting empowerment of poor neighborhoods. This "empowerment effect" is an important application of the Agency's democracy initiative. By encouraging local participation in the process of acquiring municipal goods and services for poor neighborhoods, the Bolivia program also supports the Agency's New Partnerships Initiative.

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LAC TECH II is a regional technical project managed by the Office of Regional Sustainable Development, USAID Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC.RSD/BBEG). The project provides support services to USAID Missions and the LAC Bureau in agriculture and natural resources management.

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